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SUBJECT: EU INFORMAL MINISTERIAL IN SALZBURG:
FERRERO-WALDNER ON UKRAINE, BELARUS

REF: A) VIENNA 758 B) VIENNA 761 C) USEU BRUSSELS 886

This is a joint Vienna - USEU cable.

BELARUS

¶11. Speaking at the informal "Gymnich" meeting of the EU foreign ministers in Salzburg on March 10-11, European External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner commented that Belarus was a country "at a crossroads," with the elections a crucial test for democracy. If the elections are free and fair, she said, then the EU could offer Belarus significant benefits in the framework of the European Neighborhood Policy. However, reports from Belarus of arrests of opposition politicians during the campaign were deeply disturbing. Ferrero-Waldner called for their immediate release, and for the government of Belarus to respect all international democratic standards. Should the Belarus elections not be free and fair, the EU would say so. The EU was then prepared to take targeted restrictive measures against the people who rigged the election. Ferrero-Waldner said that the EU had not yet composed a list of Belarusian leaders who might become subject to such sanctions, however.

UKRAINE

¶12. On Ukraine, Ferrero-Waldner lauded the progress it had made on the EU's Action Plan and said maintaining momentum was key. She noted that the current election campaign was fiercely contested, but appeared so far to be free and fair. Ferrero-Waldner said the EU stood ready to work with any Ukrainian coalition that emerges from free and fair elections, and held out the prospect of an EU-Ukraine free trade agreement. French Foreign Minister Douste-Blazy, in a separate appearance, supported Ferrero-Waldner's comments. He added that the EU must work with the new Ukrainian government to resolve the problem of Transnistria.
McCaw